

Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 18, 1807, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE J. MSS. (JAMES MADISON.)

Monticello, August 18, 1807.

Dear Sir, —I return you the papers received yesterday. Mr. Erskine complains of a want of communication between the British armed vessels *in the* Chesapeake, or *off* the coast. If, by *off* the coast, he means those which, being generally in our waters, go occasionally out of them to cruize or to acquire a title to communicate with their consul, it is too poor an evasion for him to expect us to be the dupes of. If vessels *off* the coast, & having never violated the proclamation, wish to communicate with their consul, they may send in by any vessel, without a flag. He gives a proof of their readiness to restore deserters, from an instance of the *Chichester* lying along-side a wharf at Norfolk. It would have been as applicable if Capt Stopfield and his men had been in a tavern at Norfolk. All this, too, a British sergeant *is ready* to swear to; & further, that he saw British deserters enlisted in their British uniform by our officer. As this fact is probably false, & can easily be inquired into, names being given, and as the story of the *Chichester* can be ascertained by Capt Saunders, suppose you send a copy of the paper to the Secy of the Navy, and recommend to him having an inquiry made. We ought gladly to procure evidence to hang the pirates, if no objection or difficulty occur from the place of trial. If the *Driver* is the scene of trial, where is she? if in our waters, we can have no communication with her, if out of them, it may be inconvenient to send the witnesses. Altho' there is neither candor nor dignity in soliciting the victualling the *Columbine* for 4 months for a voyage of 10 days, yet I

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think you had better give the permission. It is not by these huckstering manoeuvres that the great national question is to be settled. I salute you affectionately.¹

¹ On the next day, Jefferson wrote to Madison:

“ . . . It will be very difficult to answer Mr. Erskine's demand respecting the water casks in the tone proper for such a demand. I have heard of one who, having broke his cane over the head of another, demanded paiment for his cane. This demand might well enough have made part of an offer to pay the damages done to the *Chesapeake* and to deliver up the authors of the murders committed on board her. I return you the papers received yesterday. The Governor has enclosed me a letter from Genl Mathews of August 13, mentioning the recent arrival of a ship in the Chesapeake, bearing the flag of a Vice-Admiral; from whence he concludes that Barclay has arrived. I salute you affectionately.”